

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE D17

THE WASHINGTON POST
13 October 1981

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Qaddafi Is Said To Voice Threat Against Reagan

Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who organized more than one assassination plot against his archrival, Anwar Sadat, has his eye on even bigger quarry: Ronald Reagan. He confided as much in a telephone conversation with Ethiopian strongman Mengistu Haile Mariam last August.

The call was intercepted and translated by the National Security Agency, which reported the substance of the conversation to the White House, sources told my associate Dale Van Atta.

The disturbing conversation occurred on the weekend following a particularly galling humiliation for Qaddafi, the shooting down by American fliers of two Libyan jets in the Mediterranean. Expressing anger over the incident, Qaddafi vowed that he would go ahead with plans to have Reagan assassinated.

This was no spur-of-the-moment decision or casual braggadocio to impress a fellow dictator. Just the week before the aerial encounter, a Libyan group called "Free Unionist Officers" had vowed publicly to exact revenge for any harm to Qaddafi by attacking "U.S. interests any-

where," and seeking "the physical liquidation" of Americans, beginning with Reagan.

Besides the shooting down of his jets, Qaddafi may have had another, more personal, reason to want vengeance on the United States. As I've reported, fugitive ex-CIA agent Ed Wilson, who had been hiding out in Tripoli, made a secret visit to Rome in July to hold a series of meetings with U.S. officials, ostensibly to discuss the criminal charges outstanding against him in this country.

Intelligence sources said that one of the U.S. officials was the CIA's station chief in Rome, and that he was assigned to get Wilson's cooperation in the assassination of Qaddafi. The CIA reportedly planned to employ a poisoned dart disguised as a black fly.

If this gave Qaddafi some justification for an attack on Reagan, he clearly doesn't lack the means or the determination to try. In April, 1980, he warned Libyan expatriates to come home or suffer "physical elimination." Since then, at least 10 anti-Qaddafi exiles have been murdered in Italy, West Germany, Britain, Greece and the United States.

A common threat that runs through these killings seems to be a ring of American renegades who ran with Wilson and his sidekick, Frank Terpil, another ex-CIA agent. Terpil is believed to be hiding out in Beirut.

Eugene Tafoya, the former Green Beret accused of shooting a Libyan exile student in Colorado a year ago, worked for Wilson in Libya, and visited him in Tripoli just before the Colorado shooting.

In addition, Wilson is charged with attempting to arrange the assassination of another Qaddafi critic by three anti-Castro Cubans who had once worked for the CIA.

Another Wilson-Terpil associate, Joseph G. McElroy, is suspected of supplying weapons to Qaddafi hit squads, although he denies it.

For years, meanwhile, Qaddafi had been trying to knock off Sadat. The Libyan strongman concocted a new assassination plot "every three to six months," one intelligence source said. I personally asked Qaddafi about reports that he was trying to arrange Sadat's demise. The Libyan leader told me: "Sadat will be eliminated by the Egyptian people."

Footnote: The CIA has emphatically denied planning or talking about an assassination attempt on Qaddafi with Wilson or anyone else. An agency spokesman pointed out that a standing executive order prohibits the CIA from "engaging in or conspiring to engage in assassination," and insists the agency hasn't violated that order. He even denied that the CIA met with Wilson in Rome, as does Wilson's lawyer.